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ABSTRACT

Summarized are the proceedings of a 4-day institute on career opportunities for visually handicapped secretaries. The proceedings are presented in the form of official minutes. General topics briefly mentioned include basic and interpersonal skills thought to be necessary for successful visually handicapped secretaries, psychological testing, educational needs of secretarial training, job placement, community involvement, employer attitudes; different kinds of secretaries, office aids for the visually handicapped, a research project and a laboratory-demonstration school, the prospective employee's good will, education of employers concerning competencies of visually handicapped secretaries, image of blindness, and the hesitant employer. (CB)

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NATIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

ON SPECIAL AND TECHNICAL SECRETARIAL OCCUPATIONS

FOR THE BLIND

Held at
The Sherman House
Chicago, Illinois

May 19 - 22, 1971

Funded by
Social and Rehabilitation Services Administration
-- Division for the Blind --
U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Washington, D. C.

Through

The Hadley School for the Blind
700 Elm Street
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FORWARD

INSTITUTE OF IDEAS---
PRELUDE TO ACTION!

This report summarizes a four-day Institute with one compelling theme: The time has come for ACTION in opening job opportunities for competent secretaries with a visual impairment in new and specialized fields.

Competence by the secretary--enlightenment for the employer--the beginning that builds up momentum--from the key-note address by International President Phyllis Bauer of the National Secretaries Association to the final gavel on the last creative session, these factors were stressed as the ingredients of action.

Action is already coming through the individual and collective efforts of Institute participants. Each reader of this report can join the effort--with his firm, with his group, through his friends, by example. Social ideas are rendered dynamic only as they become PEOPLE IN ACTION.

Action began yesterday. With your help, it will continue through many tommorrows.

NATIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE ON SPECIAL AND TECHNICAL SECRETARIAL OCCUPATIONS FOR THE BLIND

A National Training Institute on Special and Technical Secretarial Occupations for the Blind met at the Sherman House, Chicago, Illinois, from May 19th through May 22, 1971. The Institute was funded through the Division for the Blind of Social and Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, by a grant to the Hadley School for the Blind, Winnetka, Illinois. The Institute was organized and directed by Dr. Richard Kinney, Executive Vice President of the Hadley School.

Forty-six persons highly qualified in their respective fields and residing in all parts of the United States and one overseas country participated including counselors, trainers, teachers, scientists, specialists, employers, and secretaries. The following officially participated in at least one day of the Institute:

Toni E. Baker, Stenographer, Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Mary Ballard, Legal Secretary, Martin, Dutcher, Cooke, Mousaw and Vigdor
Phyllis Bauer, International President, National Secretaries Association
Mary K. Bauman, Director, Personnel Research and Guidance
Matt Berry, Chief of Program Services, Texas Commission for the Blind
Natalie Black, Receptionist-Secretary, Texas State Commission for the Blind
Shirley Boaz, Secretary, Com-Lab
Dr. Bradley Burson, Physicist, Argonne National Laboratory
Helen Bushell, Consultant, Hadley School
Floyd Cargill, Chief of Blind Services, Illinois Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Edmund D'Elia, Supervisor, Research and Statistics, Illinois Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Jo Marie DiMaggio, Employee Relations Specialist, NASA
Jerome Dunham, Supervisor, Washington Services for the Blind
C. Marianne Fisher, Speech Correctionist, Salt Lake City School District
Lawrence Ginensky, Clinical Director, Illinois Visually Handicapped Institute
Mae Glassbrenner, President, Chicago College of Commerce
R. A. Graham, National Manager, Rehabilitation Program, IBM Corporation
Howard Hanson, Director, South Dakota Service to the Visually Impaired
Donald Wing Hathaway, President, Hadley School
Constance Hubbard, Counselor, California Department of Rehabilitation
Esther Husney, Secretary
Betty Ann Jones, Supervising Secretary, Commercial Travelers Mutual Insurance
Charles Kaufman, Attorney at Law, Vedder, Price, Kaufman and Kamholz
Dr. Richard Kinney, Executive Vice President, Hadley School
Louise Kirch, Secretarial Specialist, Montgomery Ward
Mary Alice Krakos, State Handicap Specialist, Illinois State Employment Service
Meg Kuhn, Public Relations Secretary, Hadley School
Charlene Lum, Medical Transcriber, St. Francis Hospital, Honolulu

George Magers, Assistant Chief, Division for the Blind, SRSA, HEW
Bryant Moore, Placement Specialist, Colorado Department of Social Services
Margaret Morton, Teaching Assistant, Business Education, University of North Dakota
Robert Mullineaux, Coordinator for Employment of the Handicapped, Social Security Administration
Gertrude Musier, Senior Staff Assistant, IBM Corporation
Florence Neil, Medical Placement Specialist, California Department of Human Resources
Enrique Pajon, Director of Spanish Offices, Hadley School, Madrid, Spain
Jean Palormo, Industrial Testing Director, Science Research Associates
John Parsons, Supervisor, Blind Services, Alabama Vocational Rehabilitation Service
Viola Peacher, Medical Record Librarian, Methodist Hospital, Indianapolis
Lilly Ann Perlmutter, New York Association for the Blind
William Reckert, Shorthand Reporter, U. S. Department of Justice
Charles Reynolds, Personnel Director, Combined Insurance of America
Sue Ann Schulgin
Eugene Spurrier, Rehabilitation Supervisor, Maryland Board of Education
Louis Vieceli, Assistant Professor, Southern Illinois University, Rehabilitation Institute
Nicholas Williams, Coordinator of Employment of the Handicapped, IRS
Margaret Wilson, Instructor, California Department of Education

The Institute convened Wednesday afternoon, May 19, with a welcoming address by Mr. John D. Mabie, retiring Chairman of the Board of the Hadley School for the Blind, who applauded productive cooperation among public and private institutions, professional and lay individuals. A moving response based on her own experience in becoming a medical transcriber was given by Miss Charlene Lum, Institute participant and Hadley School's Student of the Year.

Mrs. Phyllis Bauer, International President of the National Secretaries Association, addressed the Conference on current and future directions in the secretarial field. According to the National Secretaries Association, a secretary is defined as "An executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, who demostrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, who exercises initiative judgement and who makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority."

Mrs. Bauer stressed education, diligence and reasoning as necessities for successful secretaries. In addition to the basic skills of typing and shorthand and a sound knowledge of grammar, the secretary must have the ability to listen and communicate well. She must have both an interest in her job and an interest in other people. Personal development and outside activities can add much to professionalism on the job.

Dr. Richard Kinney traced the record of accomplishment of the previous joint efforts of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the Hadley School. "It is hoped," he said, "that by meeting this week, pooling our ideas, pooling our resources, we can open up new avenues of employment for the blind." The purpose of the Institute was formally stated as follows: "To identify, formulate, and develop guidelines and other materials helpful in broadening vocational opportunities for visually handicapped persons in the challenging and multi-faceted field of specialized secretarial work."

The importance of informal discussion and reflection on methods of realizing these goals was emphasized. "By putting our united brain power together, we can increase our united earning power."

The Panel Chairmen were introduced: Floyd Cargill, Selecting and Testing
Lilly Ann Perlmutter, Training
Louis Vieceli, Placement
Trudy Musier, Employers
Betty Ann Jones, Employed Secretaries.

Donald Hathaway, President of the Hadley School, and George Magers, AssistantChief, Division for the Blind, SRSA, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, were also introduced.

The opening remarks on Thursday, May 20, were made by Dr. Kinney, who then appointed Donald Hathaway as Presiding Chairman of the morning session. Before introducing the first Panel, Mr. Hathaway thanked Douglas MacFarland and George Magers for making the Institute possible.

Mr. Floyd Cargill, Chairman of the Panel on Selecting and Testing, explained that we must consider the characteristics and potentialities of the individual who seeks employment as a specialized secretary. Suitability is a criterion for success.

Mr. Ginensky, Panel member, discussed complete psychological testing as a means to determine a particular occupational orientation. Test areas should include: daily living, typing, braille, mobility, physical education, industrial arts, and crafts.

Mrs. Bauman, another Panel member, observed from her placement files that successful blind secretaries usually follow these general patterns: good dexterity; interest in social service, clerical and literary fields; are highly persuasive, positive thinkers, independent, social but not especially dominent.

Mrs. Palormo discussed validization and use of tests in the light of her experience with Science Research Associates.

The Panel agreed that testing is necessary to determine relevant qualities.

A good test must be valid (it can be used to predict behavior), have an accurate hypothesis, reliability, standardization, and a thorough field test.

The Panel on Training, chaired by Mrs. Perlmutter, with Mrs. Ballard, Miss Glassbrenner, and Mrs. Wilson as Panelists, first considered the office equipment secretarial training should cover. Included were the typewriter, dictating machine, telephone, intercom, file cabinets, and duplicating machines. In addition to familiarity and excellence with all office machinery, training goals should also encompass good listening ability, mobility, pleasant speech and voice, impeccable appearance, and a sincere attitude. Strong vocabulary and grammar are essential. A visually handicapped secretarial candidate must also master braille and some form of braille shorthand. Intensive instructions and practice are needed until all skills are attained.

Accuracy, rather than speed, in typing is even more essential for the blind secretary. In preparatory training, too, accuracy is vital. The extra time and money spent in accurate training will pay off for years to come.

The subsequent Panel, chaired by Mr. Louis Vieceli and with Mr. Berry, Mr. Graham, Miss Neil, and Mr. Spurrier participating, dealt with the subject of Placement. Mr. Vieceli stated, "I like to think of placement as being not a separate or distinct service, but an ongoing part of the total rehabilitation process. Placement begins with the initial interview and continues through putting the individual on the job and follow-up to assure success." Good placement technique evaluates a person on the basis of his total capacity, including experience, training, aptitudes, skills and physical qualifications.

Since most aspiring secretaries will not start at the top, the Panel pointed out that many possibilities lie in the broad catagory between transcriber and executive secretary. In fields of employment, the blind applicant has to be competitive; he or she must not ask any special favors or lenience of his employer. The blind applicant must have at least equal, though preferably better, qualifications. Not only is this necessary for the successful employment of the individual, but it is meaningful to other blind applicants who follow. Frequently, a company may not hesitate to employ others if the first sightless employee was an industrious and competent worker.

It was decided that successful job placement relies on complete community involvement--the combined efforts of businessmen, social agencies, and educators.

The Presiding Chairman of the afternoon session, Floyd Cargill, explained, "This afternoon we will look at two sides of the coin. We are going to look at the point of view of the employer, then we will look at the employee's

point of view."

Since a new employee is an investment for the employer in terms of training time and production, Mr. Cargill observed, it is not surprising that employers are concerned about choosing the right applicant.

The Panel on Employers covered the areas of legal, insurance, and corporate secretaries. Mr. Charles R. Kaufman, attorney, noted that lawyers are by nature critical in outlook and observed that a legal secretary must basically be a SUPERIOR secretary, rather than an expert on legal matters. Mr. Charles Reynolds, of Combined Insurance, reported from his experience that seemingly minor technical matters of ability to fill out forms can cause serious problems for the visually impaired secretary if her preparatory training has not provided solutions or if her employer does not realize that such technical problems, when they arise, are susceptible to solution. Mrs. Kirsch, of Montgomery Ward, confirmed that access to advice on solving occasional problems of technique would be both helpful to the visually impaired secretary and reassuring to the employer.

The consensus was reached that a well-qualified person with a physical disability who combines the proper skills with the will to do well can accomplish his goals and be an asset to his employer in all the areas discussed.

Trudy Musier, Chairman of the Panel on Employers, recommended that the Government be persuaded to issue a directive stating that qualified persons with a physical disability be given jobs in competitive fields. Hopefully, private enterprise would then follow with a similar statement. She stressed that they not be "charity cases", but competitive placements. An equal emphasis was placed on follow-up. If, in a company that has successfully hired blind secretaries, an opening comes up, an effort should be made to fill subsequent position with qualified blind persons.

The Panel on Employed Secretaries made use of the first-hand knowledge of its Panelists. Under the Chairmanship of Betty Ann Jones, Panel members Mrs. Ballard, Mrs. Black, Mr. Boaz, Dr. Burson, and Mr. Reckert, discussed techniques they have effectively used to fulfill the following office tasks: greeting clients; answering telephones; taking down messages and typing them; keeping address books and calendars; using spelling books and dictionaries; handling of forms; rewriting and making revisions; and using dictating equipment.

Dr. Bradley Burson, Panel member, explained several types of office aids available to the visually impaired. These include: MT/ST typewriter, Steno-mask, Rand Sight Television System, Optacon, braille verifier, braille tape/inkprint typewriter, and Argonne Braille Reading Machine.

Friday, May 21, was devoted to individual meetings of each of the five Panels. Participants joined the area in which they could contribute the most in the writing of guidelines.

George Magers was the Presiding Chairman for the Saturday morning session. In discussing job opportunities, he noted that unless the market greatly opens up to visually handicapped persons, there will be many well qualified persons for a restricted number of jobs. We must plan now to prepare for the influx of applicants. In his words, "We are going to have to give much greater attention to imagination, to ingenuity, and to initiative...in developing new and innovative approaches to providing guidance, services, vocational training, and placement activities."

Mr. Magers named these new areas of promise for the blind: physical therapist assistant, mental health aids, several kinds of technicians, trade occupations, and, of course, secretarial occupations. There is a need for finding new types of careers and for expanding old ones.

Following Mr. Magers talk, representatives of the five Panels reported the recommendations formulated by their respective groups during the writing sessions on Friday.

The Panel on Selecting and Testing maintained:

1. Employment opportunities in the secretarial fields are almost unlimited.

2. Resources are already available to select and train blind clients for secretarial and related work, and to a certain extent this is being done.

3. The knowledge and experience of psychologists and trainers should form the foundation of any project.

4. A setting should be established in which new methods for evaluation and new techniques for training could be developed and given initial trial, training could be given to psychologists and teachers who would administer the tests, certain clients could be trained as a show-case demonstration to interest employers and trainers, and jobs could be analyzed and usefully defined at the different levels in the field.

The Panel further recommended a three-stage research project and a laboratory-demonstration school. The research project would accumulate, coordinate, and analyze presently existing psychological information on persons, both successful and unsuccessful, who have been in secretarial training and/or jobs. Members of this section wished to go on record as believing that, at least in borderline cases, such non-job factors as mobility, speech, and interpersonal relationships, may make the difference between success and failure.

Finally, they concluded, it has been brought to our attention that in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Vol. II, the qualifications profile for secretarial and related work includes Physical Demands #6, or normal vision. They strongly recommended that this Conference request the deletion of Physical Demands #6 from the qualifications profile for this work, as we have many examples of successful secretaries totally without vision.

The Panel on Training submitted the following recommendations: in pre-business course preparation, the visually handicapped applicant should be evaluated in the areas of communication skills, mobility skills, personal management skills, and leisure-time skills. Prior to actual business courses, the applicant should be fully trained in any areas in which he may be deficient. Of the skills to be acquired in business training, the following areas are necessary: relationships with others; effiency on the job; telephone skills; typewriting essentials; styles of business and social correspondence, including statements and purchase orders; filing and finding; ordering supplies; meeting callers; operation of office machines; arranging meetings; editing and collating materials; pre-job skills of resumé and making appointments and interviews; taking examinations; maintenance of machinery. For specialized secretaries, training is needed in their particular area, whether medical, legal, stenotyping, etc.

The Panel on Employed Secretaries stated that the applicant must be certain that he is qualified for the job before he meets the prospective employer. He should have available for presentation to potential employers an adequate resumé of his educational background and employment experience. Since the secretarial profession is one which depends a great deal on personal contact, the importance of presenting oneself in a manner acceptable and pleasing to others must be emphasized. Independence in travel and control of the environment are of utmost significance.

The secretary must be familiar with the operation and maintenance of mechanica equipment needed for the job. It is important for every employee to become identified with the company system in which he works. The employee should make a concerted effort to grasp a feeling for the customs, protocol, and practices which prevail in the particular office. No matter how eager one might be, he should never forget who his boss is. In striving to establish a relationship with his employer, the blind secretary should expect a greater caution in accepting the competence of a blind person. Development of mutuality is necessary in establishing relationships with co-workers.

A faithful employee will try to do an individual job of public relations with a client by projecting good will through his enthusiasm for the organization. The handicapped employee must generally exert a greater effort to qualify for promotion. Advancement then will depend on willingness and effort to expand oneself and pursue educational opportunities which

lead to greater opportunity hopes.

The Panel on Employers recommended that employers be educated and made aware of the actual competence of blind persons in fulfilling secretarial positions. This could be accomplished by two primary means. The first is the preparation of a handbook of how the blind secretary can perform her duties effectively. This would of course include typing, reception, phone service, keeping calendars, filing, making travel arrangements and reservations, compiling financial data and running errands. The handbook should be written by actual successful blind secretaries, since they know the techniques and have actually field tested them. Another part of the handbook should be devoted to testimonials by the employers of some blind secretaries to back up their success. Bibliography could be included to inform readers of other materials in the same vain published by SRSA, HEW.

In the same catagory of "educating the employer" the Panel proposed a National Training Institute for Employers. Hopefully top business executives could attend and be shown actual working examples of how it's done. They could then spread the word among other business organizations. Rather than having handicapped people be charitable placements, the handicapped persons should be placed in accordance with their qualifications and potential. This comment might also be honored by placement and rehabilitation counselors.

The Panel on Placement felt that the most pressing problem as far as placement of a visually handicapped person in a job is the image of blindness itself. False attitudes about blindness held by the public need to be changed. One way to implement this would be to place the well adjusted blind person before the public through the use of mass media. Short spots on television, or in crowd scenes in films, would help to get the public to the point where they accept the handicapped person as just another individual.

Another way to help establish the blind person as a well adjusted individual when placing him is to continually make contact with a hesitant employer every month or so over a long period of time. Personality and overall possibliity may play a big part with the employer if two people have equal skills. It is the counselor's job to make sure he understands what the employer expects in the job considered. Then the counselor must match the job with the proper candidate. The final thing the counselor must bear in mind is that there can be training after a placement if need be for advancement or for new development in the job.

Mr. Magers turned the meeting over to Donald Hathaway for some final comments. Mr. Hathaway reminded the Conference that there is work that can be done right in the home of the handicapped individual, an area of opportunity that is often overlooked. Mr. Hathaway also discussed the

advantages of correspondence study either to train for gainful employment or to broaden one's background for advancement.

In conclusion, he congratulated all on their creative ideas and thanked them for contributing to the progress of others.

Dr. Kinney adjourned the meeting with the suggestion that each participant take home and promote the ideas, recommendations, and principles promulgated at the Conference, confident that they will be helping to change vocational opportunities for the better for years to come. "This Institute," he said, "is not ending--it's just taking off!"

--Richard Kinney
Executive Vice President
Hadley School for the Blind